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MY SUMMER IN THE ALPS

BY WILLIAM WILLIAMS

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AIGUILLE DES GRANDES CHARMOZ

THE FIVE SUMMITS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT ARE IMMEDIATELY UNDER THE CROSS

MY SUMMER IN THE ALPS
1913

BY
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MY SUMMER IN THE ALPS

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HAD not been in the Alps since 1905. In the interval I had visited some of the splendid mountainous regions of Colorado, Wyoming and Montana, but on horseback and not for the purpose of climbing. And now that an opportunity presented itself to return to Switzerland and again indulge my taste for mountaineering, I seized it with avidity, for the sport continued to appeal to me as strongly as ever. I can truly say that there is no pastime from which, during many years, I have derived such enjoyment as I have from climbing in the Alps.

Since I was last in Switzerland the long projected Jungfrau Railroad had become an accomplished fact as far as a point known as the Jungfraujoch, and curiosity now impelled me to seek first hand knowledge as to what it had to offer. Leaving Grindelwald early on the morning of July 30, I walked up to the Little Scheidegg in two and one-half hours and there took the train which, in a little more than an hour, carried me through a long tunnel to the Jungfraujoch. Here of a sudden one finds one's self several thousand feet above the line of perpetual snow in the very heart of some of the best snow and ice scenery of the Bernese Oberland, and at a point where even the novice can, in good weather, roam safely over several large surfaces of snow adjoining the station. To reach such a spot in such a manner was strange indeed to one accustomed to do so only through hard climbing. It is a splendid thing that those who cannot or do not care to climb, and yet have a taste for such scenery, are thus enabled to gratify it, and I cannot too strongly urge all who are not disagreeably affected by the air of high altitudes to take this small journey and witness at ease glorious phases of nature which do not exist below the snow line.

But I had come to Switzerland for exercise, and this is not obtained by riding on trains. The Jungfraujoch has already become a starting point for several excursions (including, for instance, the Jungfrau) and with knowledge of this fact I had brought along guides from Grindelwald. Leaving the train at Jungfraujoch we proceeded to cross the Mönchjoch, a great snow pass with an altitude of about 12,000 feet, which led us into the midst of further magnificent scenery, so that during the course of the day I saw again every important peak of the Bernese Oberland, including Jungfrau, Mönch, Eiger, Schreckhorn, Finsteraarhorn, Viescherhörner and Aletschhorn; and as I looked at them I recalled much of the pleasure and some of the difficulties and excitement experienced in climbing them in years past. Our walk lasted only four hours, as we rejoined the train at the Eismeer station, but it proved to be a good practice walk and furnished considerable exercise; for our start being a late one and the weather warm and clear, we encountered soft snow throughout, which rendered the going heavy. Frequently we sank to above our knees and sometimes to our waists.

At Eismeer I was struck by some of the decorative inscriptions in the waiting-room. One read as follows:

"Ob Juden, Haiden, oder Christen,
Wir sind auf Erden nur Touristen."

To post the following, however true, involved some boldness on the part of a management doubtless quite as anxious to receive the money of "fools" as of any other class of travelers:

"Den Narren kann man nicht entgehen,
Auch auf den höchsten Bergeshöhen."

"Ihre Torheit zu beweisen,
Gehen viele Leut' auf Reisen."

"Ist einer ein Esel und sonst nichts weiter,
So wird er durch Reisen nicht gescheiter."

As principal climbing centres for this summer I selected Zermatt and Chamonix and proceeded to the former from Grindelwald on August 1, traveling first by automobile through Interlaken, Spiez and the beautiful Simmenthal to Martigny, and thence by train. My excellent guide of 1905, Joseph Taugwalder, I found to be engaged, but through him was introduced to Hieronymus Julen, another first-class guide, who in turn selected Adolph Julen as second guide, and on Saturday, August 2, by way of further practice, we ascended the Riffelhorn. The time required to put one's self into training, so that difficult walking and climbing shall be an enjoyment and never a burden, will vary with the individual, but three or four short, stiff excursions will accomplish a great deal in this direction and usually prove sufficient; this, at least, is my experience. The Riffelhorn is a rock well known to most mountaineers as affording many interesting short climbs, some easy, some rather difficult. I have been on it at least half a dozen times. Elsewhere I have described the route known as the "Matterhorn Couloir." To-day we took the "Sky-line" route, and I returned to Zermatt with some further exercise to my credit and in better condition than I was before.

ALPHUBEL PASS

Our next excursion was across the beautiful Alphubel Pass to the valley of Saas, lying easterly and parallel to that of Zermatt. On the afternoon of August 3 we went to sleep at the modest inn at Täschalp, whence we started for our pass at 2.30 a. m. next day, using a lantern for the first hour and a half. It was good to be again walking in that crisp morning air, and glorious scenery of rock, ice and snow began unfolding itself with the approach of dawn. This occurred shortly before 4, when we observed a faint gray light on the great snow peaks about us, followed, perhaps an hour later, by the early rays of the sun, at first on a few of the highest and later on countless smaller ones. This impressive spectacle is one I have often had the chance to witness, and each time it has seemed more beautiful than the last.

We walked for four hours without halt except to adjust the rope upon reaching the ice, and at 6.30 stopped for breakfast at a point about an hour below the summit of the pass. The Alphubel is justly noted for its fine views, and thanks to the cloudless weather we were able to enjoy them fully. It is not often that one breakfasts with a panorama of such surpassing beauty as was spread out before us on this occasion, comprising as it did Monte Rosa, Lyskamm, Castor and Pollux, Breithorn and Matterhorn, all in a perfect setting, partly in the shade, partly in the soft light of the early sun. Between us and the two peaks first named the eye met nothing but snow and ice extending over many miles and to an altitude of some 15,000 feet. We gained the summit of the Alphubel at 7.40, and there, at an elevation of about 12,500 feet, enjoyed further splendid views in new directions. The descent to the village of Saas Fee, which we reached at noon, calls for no special mention, except that after 8 it became very hot, the snow soft and the going heavy. We were constantly sinking in below our knees (as on the Mönchjoch) while my face, which was not yet hardened to the extremes of cold and heat encountered on Alpine excursions, continued to burn throughout the rest of the day.

The village of Saas Fee enjoys a picturesque location in an amphitheatre formed by splendid peaks, the greatest of which are the two noble Mischabelhörner, the Dom and the Täschhorn, each of them nearly 15,000 feet high. It has not yet been invaded by the railroad, and the postal service from Stalden is still performed with the aid of some fifty mules.

Our plan was to return to Zermatt via the Nadelhorn, and for this purpose we went, the day following (August 5), to sleep at the Mischabel hut, situated at a height of nearly 11,000 feet on the slopes of the Dom. We were four and one-half hours in reaching it. Two other parties had preceded us, one French, the other English. Upon entering the hut I was struck at once with the bad air within, and came to the conclusion that the Englishmen had not cared to raise the issue of ventilation with the Frenchmen. But I felt obliged to do so and am glad to say that we soon found ourselves in accord. It was even

SAAS FEE AND ALPHUBEL PASS

agreed that a small window should remain open throughout the night. Guides, of course, never see any reason why fresh air should be let into a mountain hut, and most Continental tourists entertain the same views.

The weather, in the meantime, had turned bad; it came on to snow, and we retired with but small hopes of being able to cross the Nadelhorn next day. Upon awaking we found that there was no improvement and were confronted with the alternative of waiting in the hut for good weather (with the necessity of sending down to the valley for more food) or utilizing the period of bad weather to proceed to the base of some other peak. We chose the latter, wisely, as the event showed, and, descending quickly to Saas Fee, walked thence in four hours through the long valley of Saas to Stalden, observing on the way a peasant woman smoking a long pipe while at work in the fields. At Stalden we took the train for Zermatt.

POLLUX

The day following was a rainy one at Zermatt, but on Friday, August 8, it cleared—at least partially—and in the afternoon we went to sleep at the Gandeck hut, near the foot of the Breithorn. The twin peaks of Castor and Pollux, usually mentioned together and well known to all who have enjoyed the view from the Gornergrat, were the only ones of the larger peaks about Zermatt which I had not heretofore climbed, and we hoped on this occasion to ascend one or perhaps both of them. During the late afternoon and evening at the Gandeck the weather was warm and unsettled, and the clouds could not make up their minds whether to stay or go, with the result that the magnificent peaks about us were seen amidst numerous varying and beautiful atmospheric effects. At one time all that could be seen of Dent Blanche, Gabelhorn, Rothorn and Weisshorn was their final points above a great sea of clouds. At another, all but the uppermost part of the Matterhorn was in cloud, the portion visible presenting the appearance of a triangle of the size and shape of the pyramid of the Rothorn, but tipping in the opposite direction. The scene was weird and fascinating beyond

the power of words adequately to describe, and I went to bed reluctantly.

We were to start at 2 a. m., but so unsettled was the weather that we did not venture to leave until 3.45, at which time it cleared suddenly, and at once it became evident that a beautiful morning was before us. For two and a half hours we followed the Breithorn route, walking over easy, rising snow fields on which there were at least six parties, four of them bound for the Breithorn, one for Castor and one for Pollux, all advancing rapidly. The sun rose on a cloudless sky and its first pale illumination of the splendid peaks surrounding us furnished a most beautiful picture, so beautiful in fact that it seemed as if we should cease walking and devote our whole attention to it. After thus rising for two and a half hours we began skirting the long, southerly face of the Breithorn—a most interesting route—and at 7.15 were at its westerly end, where we halted for breakfast, an hour's walk thereafter bringing us to the foot of the southerly Pollux arête. Usually its ascent presents no particular difficulty, but this was a bad year for rock climbing by reason of the extraordinary amount of snow, which indeed rendered some of the great rock peaks quite unclimbable throughout the whole season. Snow in the rocks operates to conceal or destroy wholly or in part the usefulness of any foot and hand-holds, while offering no proper substitute, especially when soft. We made slow time and were not on the summit until 11. We were then at a height of approximately 13,500 feet. A strong, cold wind was blowing and the atmospheric conditions were generally so disagreeable that we remained on top but two minutes.

As we approached the base of the peak on the descent we noted that banks of fog were rising from Italy, and indeed this fog soon enveloped us, rendering it inadvisable, especially at so late an hour in the day, to attempt to climb the adjoining Castor. The problem before us was how best to reach Zermatt before bad weather should set in, and we selected the shortest route via the Schwarzthor. "Thor" means gateway, and this was indeed one of magnificent proportions, lying between Pollux and the Breithorn and leading down the Schwärze Glacier to the

Gorner Glacier below. Fortunately the Italian fog halted at the Schwarzthor and did not cross the boundary into Switzerland.

The upper portion of the Schwärze Glacier consists of steep slopes of snow, and these were becoming very soft under the influence of a hot sun. We literally waded down them, and as we approached the bottom entered a veritable maze of broken and fissured ice, with surrounding ice towers, or séracs, differing however from the ordinary maze in that it sloped downward, which circumstance, taken in conjunction with the softness of the snow, would have rendered very difficult the task of returning; in fact, to remount the 2,000 feet of steep, soft snow that afternoon would have been next to impossible. As we progressed, we seemed to become more and more involved and finally found ourselves on a transverse band of ice with the way to the next one apparently barred. Usually, where the intervening fissures are too wide to be jumped, one can get around the ends, but not so here. After much careful consideration the guides determined that to extricate ourselves it would be necessary to enter what may be roughly described as an ice cave, and cut our way up partitions of ice within this cave a distance of some twenty feet. This was attended with some danger owing to the possibility of the chopping on a hot afternoon bringing down portions of the ice above; but as a result of much delicate ice work on the part of the guides we finally emerged in safety on to the next band of ice, whence progress became relatively easy. The descent of the Schwarzthor is not usually accompanied with serious difficulties and those encountered may be ascribed to the abnormal amount of snow, which affected materially the movement and configuration of the lower portion of the Schwärze Glacier.

UNTERGABELHORN

The day following the ascent of Pollux we went to the Trift Inn, some two hours above Zermatt, where we spent the night preparatory to climbing the Untergabelhorn. We started Monday morning, August 11, at 4 a. m., the lateness of the hour being due to the fact that the excursion, though an exceedingly interesting one, was to be short. The weather was all that could be desired and we selected for our route the east

ridge, noted for the excellent rock climbing which it affords. A fine rock climb is one of the greatest joys known to the mountaineer and a most exhilarating form of exercise, bringing into play almost every muscle and part of the body, for the hands and feet are not alone sufficient in the ascent or descent of difficult rocks, and where either good hand or foot-hold is wanting one discovers how much can be done with the elbows, the knees, the shoulders and the back. Some of the very best rock climbing is found on "arêtes," or ridges, which almost always have their teeth, needles or pinnacles, sometimes termed "gendarmes," and these usually present interesting and perplexing problems by reason of the sharpness of their edges and the steepness of their sides, rendering it often as hard to cross as to turn or circumvent them. In the case of the Untergabelhorn the best of the climbing lasted, it is true, not much over an hour, but while it lasted it was most interesting and exciting and included crossing three needles. We were on the summit at 9.30, where we found ourselves surrounded on all sides by great peaks, so that the views were of the best in every direction. The Matterhorn, always impressive, seemed peculiarly so from this point. We remained on the summit a long time, for it was good to be there in such weather, and upon leaving proceeded leisurely to Zermatt by the usual route.

In a season of variable weather such as this, one must take at least some chances if anything is to be accomplished, and by starting for a hut in the rain one may be able to make the ascent in fine weather: for this may come next day and last only twenty-four hours. Tuesday, August 12, it rained hard, nor were conditions on Wednesday much better; but, believing that they must change shortly, we started Wednesday afternoon for the Schönbühl hut, up the Zmutt Glacier, intending to cross next day to Arolla via the Col d'Hérens and the Col de Bertol. Upon reaching the hut we found that we were not the only ones who were willing to gamble on the weather for the following day, four other parties having preceded us, all anxious to do something. The guides woke me at 3. It had cleared considerably during the night, but the air was unnaturally warm and there were threatening clouds. It was almost a foregone con-

MATTERHORN FROM SLOPES OF UNTERGABELHORN

clusion that the day would not be fine, but the passes selected, though lofty ones, did not belong to the very difficult class and we thought the weather would be at least good enough for their crossing. So we started at 4. Much soft snow had fallen, rendering the going laborious, but that was relatively unimportant; the real difficulty that we had to contend with was fog, the configuration of the Col d'Hérens and the intervening space between it and the Bertol being such that at least moderately clear weather was necessary for a safe crossing. We walked slowly toward the first pass, hoping that the fog would lift as the hours advanced. A slight improvement would have enabled us to make a dash and get across, but it did not come; instead there arose a furious snow storm accompanied by great cold and by 10 a. m. we realized, though then near the summit, that we could not return too soon to the lower levels. Only those who have experienced it can appreciate what bad weather means at great altitudes. We had a veritable taste of severe winter weather in mid-summer. In an hour after turning back we were out of the snow storm and reached Zermatt in due course in a heavy rain. Apparently several days of bad weather were in store for Zermatt, so I decided to take this opportunity to change my base of operations to Chamonix.

AIGUILLE D'ARGENTIÈRE

It so happened that I had done less climbing at Chamonix than in most of the other districts of the Alps and I was exceedingly glad to go there again. Twenty-four years had elapsed since I had visited it, and numerous were the changes which I noticed. The railroad has resulted in converting what was formerly a quiet mountain village into a small town with up-to-date shops, beer gardens and a theatre, and you are now whizzed in an automobile to your hotel instead of walking to it from the spot where the "diligence" used to leave you. Arriving as I did at night, I went to bed thinking Chamonix a far less attractive place than formerly, and it was not until I awoke next morning and looked up at the familiar mountains that I fully realized that its principal attractions had not been affected by the onward march of civilization. I put up at Couttet's Hotel,

with its beautiful garden, and having secured the services of two excellent guides, Jules Burnet and Jean Devouassoud, arranged to start the following afternoon for the Aiguille d'Argentière. I owed my good luck in finding two such guides disengaged at the height of the season to the fact that it was one of such variable weather that business was slack. In past years I had ascended Mont Blanc, the Aiguille Verte and the two peaks of the Aiguille du Dru, and the Aiguille d'Argentière would take me into a portion of the chain with which I was not very familiar. The guides and I first went shopping for food and I was conducted to the "Faisan doré," an excellent charcuterie or delicatessen store. We found there just what we wanted, including wonderful cheeses and the best of honey in glass jars of convenient size. Cheese and honey are two of the articles of food on which I have usually relied in climbing, some of the others being bread, butter, chicken and sardines. A curious combination, some may say, and there may be no particular virtue in it, but it has served my purposes well and does not differ widely from that taken by others on mountain excursions. At the evening meal in a hut a thick, nourishing soup forms almost invariably the principal dish. Some climbers drink light wine (usually "vin du pays"), others tea, my personal preference being for the former.

Leaving Chamonix we passed through the village of Argentière and then ascended a steep path to a small mountain inn at Lognon, high up on the Glacier d'Argentière, where we spent the night. We started next morning at 1.30, the moon lighting the way. Mountaineering is the only pastime I know of in which the hours between midnight and five o'clock, when nature may be at her loveliest, are regularly used for out-of-door exercise. It goes without saying that very hard work cannot be done either on rocks or snow while reliance must be placed on moonlight or lantern light, but the approach, lasting from two to five hours, to that part of the climb which is to test one's powers is not as a rule difficult. On the contrary, it will often be across a smooth glacier, or over snowfields with an easy incline, and almost always one is surrounded by and coming nearer to peaks which lose nothing of their magnificence as seen on a clear night.

AIGUILLES DU CHARDONNET AND D'ARGENTIERE

THE SUMMIT OF THE LATTER IS IMMEDIATELY UNDER THE CROSS

And when, in addition, it happens that the splendid snow mountains of these regions are bathed in moonlight, I doubt whether there exists a more beautiful scene in nature, or a form of exercise more fascinating and exhilarating than that of walking at such a time and in such a place.

Substantially these conditions existed at the beginning of the walk we were taking on this occasion. On our right was the picturesque Aiguille Verte with its splendid, rugged ridges known as Les Droites and Les Courtes, on our left the Aiguille du Chardonnet; and as we proceeded up the Glacier d'Argentière there came into view its wonderful amphitheatre which vies in beauty with the scenery at the end of the Mer de Glace. As we approached the junction of the Glacier du Chardonnet and the Glacier d'Argentière we crossed the latter to the left and, ascending the moraine of the former, stopped at 4.30 for a light breakfast, starting again at 5 up snowfields which led us near to the foot of our peak. At 7.15 we believed that we would be at the summit in an hour and a quarter; we did not, however, reach it until 10, for we soon came to rocks which, like those on Pollux, had been put into very bad condition through fresh snow. Ascending these we reached a shoulder of snow at the foot of the final pyramid, where another unpleasant surprise awaited us. The summit was not over 300 feet above us, but the route to it was over ice, and for more than an hour the guides were engaged in the slow process of cutting steps up a slope so steep that it was necessary in addition to cut holes for the hands. In returning we went down this slope with our faces to it—"à reculons," as the French say.

Meanwhile the weather, which had begun well, was changing rapidly, and as we arrived on our peak it became enveloped in fog, a most discouraging circumstance, especially as we were at an elevation of nearly 13,000 feet. Fortunately it lifted for a few minutes, so that we had at least a glimpse of the marvelous scenery to the south towards Mt. Dolent and the adjoining jagged peaks, whose steep, furrowed rocks, streaked with snow, presented an appearance almost fantastic. It was sad that we were to see so little of this scenery, but the skies were getting black, and at any moment we might find ourselves in the midst

of a storm. We, therefore, proceeded to descend as fast as was prudent and were off the mountain proper by 1 o'clock. Without further incident worthy of note we reached the Valley of Chamonix at 4.15, having been out approximately fifteen hours, of which thirteen and one-half were spent in walking. I went to bed early but was soon awakened by a violent thunderstorm. It was indeed fortunate for us that it had refrained from breaking until after our excursion—in every way a most interesting one—was over.

COL DE TALÈFRE

Next day, Tuesday, August 19, I went to Montanvert, a starting point for numerous fine excursions, but that and the following day it rained and rained, and all was gloom amongst the climbers there assembled. It is, however, always darkest before dawn, and the dawn came, temporarily at least, on Thursday, August 21, in the shape of very fine weather. But the new snow had rendered the best rock climbs impossible for the present, and this seemed eminently the time for me to cross one of the snow passes leading from the Mer de Glace, or its tributaries, into Italy and incidentally visit the village of Courmayeur, charmingly situated on the southerly side of Mont Blanc. Having heretofore crossed the Col du Géant (the pass usually taken), I chose the Col de Talèfre. Leaving Montanvert we proceeded a certain distance up the Mer de Glace, then turning to the left climbed some rocks, reaching in three hours the Couvercle hut, where we spent Thursday night. On the way we were startled by a loud noise, the result of the sudden collapse of several ice towers of an adjoining glacier, weighing hundreds of tons. A similar occurrence on the Brenva Glacier in Italy had a week before occasioned the death of an unfortunate porter.

The Couvercle is situated on the slopes of the Aiguille du Moine at an elevation of about 9,000 feet in immediate proximity to some of the best scenery in the Alps, the dominant peaks being Mont Blanc (which in my opinion presents a finer appearance from this, its easterly side, than any other), the Grandes Jorasses and the Aiguille Verte, with its splendid con-

tinuing ridges already referred to, Les Droites and Les Courtes. In whatever direction the eye turned, it met an impressive sight. The sunset was a splendid one and then came twilight followed by brilliant moonlight. Scenes of this sort to be appreciated must be witnessed, for in beauty they far exceed anything that may be imagined by those not acquainted with them; and however glorious these mountains may be by day, yet he who has not seen them also by moonlight knows but a part of their splendor.

Once before I had spent a night at the Couvercle, namely in 1889, when I climbed the Aiguille Verte, but then there was no hut, only a great overhanging rock under which we slept—or tried to sleep. Now we found a small but comfortable hut which on the night of August 21 sheltered several parties of climbers. I retired last and had my mattress placed on the floor of the ante-chamber where I could control the ventilation. Though the air without was crisp, yet the door remained open a bit during the night and thus we slept soundly until 3 o'clock, when we arose and breakfasted. An hour later we went out into a scene of great beauty and began our climb as moonlight was giving way to early dawn. When in 1889 we started from the Couvercle for the Aiguille Verte, we had a very hard day before us, the event of which remained uncertain until half an hour before we reached the summit, for the mountain proved to be an extremely difficult and dangerous one, nor was I surprised to learn that in some of the succeeding years, including this one, it could not be climbed at all. To-day's excursion was of a totally different character, and we were almost certain to accomplish it with relative ease.

The Col de Talèfre, as seen in the distance, resembles a tall, narrow strip of snow between the Aiguilles de Talèfre and de Triolet. The walk to the foot of it was a beautiful one over gradually rising snowfields, and as the sky was cloudless I was again enabled to witness one of those wonderful sunrises which can be seen only at high altitudes. No difficulties whatever were encountered until we were about 300 feet below the top of the pass, when the fresh snow on the final slopes gave us some trouble, as it had several times elsewhere earlier in the

season, and we were an hour covering this short distance. On the summit, which we reached at 7.40, a magnificent view of "Sunny Italy" suddenly burst upon us, and with it also a very rapid increase in the temperature, which rose from below the freezing point to 70 degrees, or thereabouts. We realized at once that the heat of the sun on the Italian side was already playing havoc with the snow slopes which we were to descend, and as they contained many hidden crevasses, we felt that we could not attack them too soon, so we left at once, and until 10.30 were struggling with rather trying conditions. We constantly sank deep into the snow, and were compelled to spend much time in dodging and circumventing a number of those deep fissures of which Tyndall has so rightly said that "to be killed in the open air would be a luxury compared with having the life squeezed out of one in the horrible gloom of these chasms." Not until 10.30, when we were off the snow, did we sit down for our first meal since 3.30 a. m. Usually one partakes of food every three or four hours; to omit doing so for seven hours is against the rules of the game and the longings of nature, but sometimes, as here, it becomes necessary to suffer awhile from hunger in the interest of safety. We were walking till about 2, when we came to the highroad leading down the Val Ferris, whence we drove in a cart to Courmayeur. Almost our last act was to wade a waist-deep glacial stream which the fresh snows had converted into a torrent.

It was our plan to start the following day for Mont Blanc and ascend it from the Italian side by the Miage Glacier. All arrangements were made accordingly, but the weather again put in its veto and compelled us to take twenty-four hours of rest we did not feel we required. They did not, however, pass at all unpleasantly. Courmayeur is beautifully located and is, furthermore, only twenty-five miles distant from the interesting town of Aosta, and since an excellent automobile service exists between the two places, I was able to spend the afternoon visiting Roman ruins, enjoying, incidentally, delightful rides down and up the valley. The dust on the highroad was laid by laborers splashing water on it from a gutter by means of spades with long handles. Courmayeur possesses an excellent hotel,

also the usual long, narrow street, closely lined with shops of every description. Amongst the articles for sale I noticed "Elixir La Brenva," named after the glacier, regardless of the fact that the Brenva route to the summit of Mont Blanc is one of the deadliest in the Alps and had only the previous week claimed another victim. High heels and hobble skirts were much in evidence in this primitive Italian village, nor was their use confined to the summer visitors. The hours subsequent to 12 noon were designated by the numbers 13 to 24 for all apparent purposes except to indicate the times of meals; but in this age of progress Courmayeur may yet have 13 o'clock lunch, 17 o'clock tea and 20 o'clock dinner.

COL DU MONT TONDU

The second day after our arrival in Courmayeur we left it for the Miage Glacier with a view to ascending Mont Blanc the next day. But again we were balked by the weather, which grew so bad towards afternoon that it would have been sheer folly to continue in the direction of a great peak. We, therefore, changed our plans and arranged to return to Chamonix via the Val de la Seigne and the Col du Mont Tondu, spending that night at a mountain inn called Les Motets. Stationed near it were several companies of the Chasseurs Alpins of the French Army, soldiers of fine appearance. One of my guides had served with them three years and he had some things of interest to relate concerning them. The inn was well filled with guests, amongst them a Frenchman and a German who, being seated at the same table, agreed to "split" a bottle of vin ordinaire, there being no half bottles. As the Frenchman was an ex-officer, I thought the transaction not without interest.

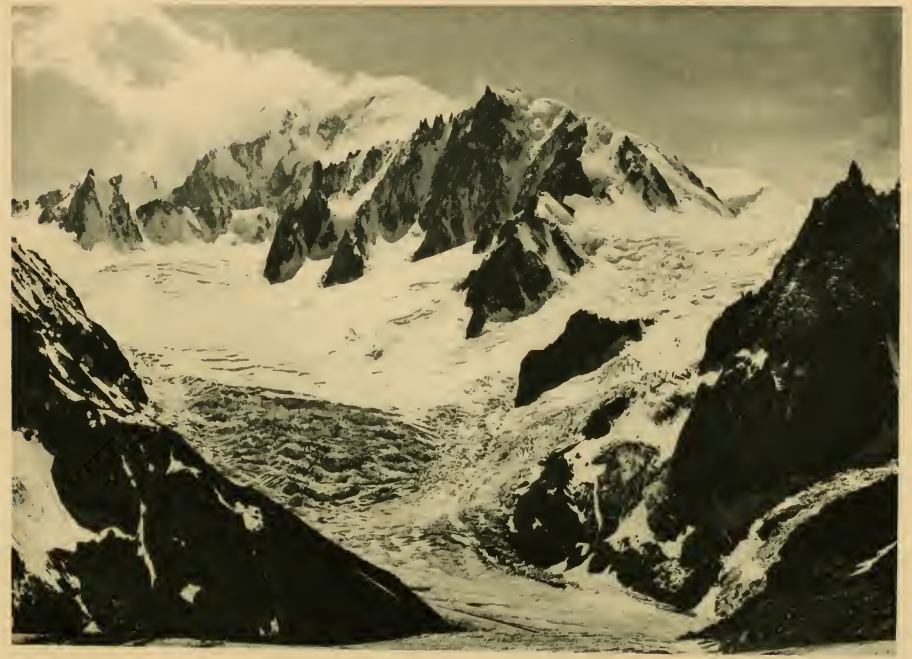
Early on the morning of August 25 we left Les Motets for the Col du Mont Tondu, the top of which we reached in three and a half hours of easy walking. From here we looked down on the other side upon the great Tré-la-Tête Glacier, which I had never seen before. Then descending to it, we crossed it and reached Contamines three hours later. We proceeded thence to St. Gervais and Chamonix and upon arriving at the last named place had, incidentally, completed the tour of Mont Blanc.

MONT BLANC

I had climbed Mont Blanc in 1881 and recently conceived a desire to revisit it. There are some who dispose of the ascent of this great mountain by referring to it as a long, tedious walk over snow fields. I do not share this view. The walk is a long one, but to me it is far from tedious, provided always one be in fit physical condition to undertake it. That person has my sympathy who is unable to derive keen enjoyment from close acquaintance with this magnificent mountain, of the vastness and beauty of whose snow fields one cannot obtain a correct conception from below. The question is often asked whether the ascent of Mont Blanc is hard or easy, but the answer depends largely on the weather conditions and the strength and experience of the climbing party. Given good weather, it may offer no serious difficulties; but the weather is often bad, and then by reason of its altitude and size, it may become a place of great danger. The mountain has a long death roll to its credit, for a great many who have no real interest in or knowledge of mountaineering are nevertheless tempted to climb it merely because it is the highest mountain in Europe, and where such people, being led by inferior guides (always plentiful), are overtaken by a furious storm, it need cause no surprise if they come to grief.

We spent the night preceding the climb at the usual point, namely, the Grands Mulets, splendidly situated at a height of over 10,000 feet in the midst of snow and ice, reaching it in five and one-half hours from Chamonix and arriving in time to enjoy the afternoon and evening views from our lofty position. Avalanches were very frequent this year and we witnessed two of the first order. The first, from the Glacier des Bossons, strewed the path below the Pierre Pointue with great blocks of ice, and would have brought death to anyone using it at that time. The other, lasting several minutes, resembled a splendid waterfall, about 400 feet high and fifty feet wide.

Next morning we left the Grands Mulets at 1.30 a. m., and reached the summit seven hours later. Of this time we were walking about six and one-quarter hours. The condition of the



MONT BLANC FROM NEAR THE CONVERCLE HUT

snow was not particularly good, but neither was it bad. The principal points on the route are: Le Petit Plateau, Le Grand Plateau, La Côte du Dôme, Le Col du Dôme, Les Bosses, La Mauvaise Arête, La Côte de la Tournette, La Culotte and the Summit. Perhaps the route may be roughly described by saying that two-thirds of it (to the Col du Dôme) is principally over steep, broad surfaces of snow, either those leading to the plateaus, or the plateaus themselves, while the remaining third is principally along ridges of snow or ice. We experienced all sorts of weather. Between 3.30 and 4 a. m., on the Grand Plateau, we were in a snow storm which threatened at one time to render further progress impossible, but we persisted and obtained our reward in the shape of clear skies later. At 6 o'clock, the weather having changed, it came on to blow strong and cold from the north, and the last two hours of the ascent were made in a wind with a velocity of 30 to 40 miles an hour and with a temperature well below freezing; which conditions, taken in connection with the rarity of the air above 14,000 feet, rendered the last part of the climb a very chilly affair. Once on the summit, we were at a height of nearly 16,000 feet above sea level and 8,000 feet above the line of perpetual snow; and so clear was the atmosphere that we remained there half an hour, notwithstanding the cold, to enjoy the wonderful scene which was spread out before us. Then, descending, we reached the Grands Mulets at 11.30 and Chamonix some three hours later.

AIGUILLE DES GRANDES CHARMOZ

There are no peaks in the world affording better rock climbing than some of the "aiguilles" about Chamonix, and few afford as good. Among such aiguilles may be mentioned the two points of the Dru, the Grépon, the Requin and the Grandes Charmoz. Their rocks are firm and offer passages about as difficult as it is possible for human beings to ascend or descend without artificial aid; indeed, to the uninitiated some of the places which with care and effort may nevertheless be scaled must often seem quite inaccessible. The joy and satisfaction of such climbing are very great, and those who have once indulged in it almost invariably return to it. Peaks of the character men-

tioned can be climbed only under favorable conditions. Above all, the rocks must be free from snow, for its presence not only makes them slippery but renders it difficult or impossible to find, or when found to use, the hand and foot-holds.

The Grandes Charmoz are one of the several splendid aiguilles with numerous sharp and jagged summits which form the westerly boundary of the Mer de Glace. With a view to its ascent we slept at Montanvert (already referred to) the day after climbing Mont Blanc, leaving it at about 2 a. m. on the following day, Friday, August 29. We proceeded for three and a half hours without halt, except to adjust the rope upon reaching the ice, and were then at the point known as the "Rognon," well up on the Glacier de Nantillon, where we breakfasted. The weather could not have been better, and from the Rognon we walked rapidly up and across the snow above this glacier, until we were at the foot of the long couloir which leads to the depression between the Charmoz and the Grépon. There our knapsacks were deposited, as well as two of the three ice-axes, for some very hard rock work lay before us and we wished to be burdened with nothing that was not indispensable. We placed a small amount of food in our pockets. After ascending the couloir for three-quarters of an hour we turned sharply to the left (the Grépon lying to the right) and were soon thereafter at close quarters with rocks which afforded us splendid climbing for about an hour. At one point we found ourselves face to face with an exceedingly steep and narrow gully, or chimney, about twenty feet high, which it was necessary to ascend by the sides, where the holds were few and awkwardly situated. A part of the distance there was a small crack. In the course of this bit of climbing one has to grip with the knees surfaces at a wide angle and, rising, throw oneself quickly and adroitly to the right and there secure a new hold higher up. The effort involved in surmounting such an obstacle as this chimney is very great and almost certain to leave one blown and ready to pause for a moment. The highest summit, called the Grande Pointe, was reached first, and we found the top of it to be a very small spot, with precipices in several directions. But the rocks were secure, and we remained several minutes to

AIGUILLE DES GRANDES CHARMOZ

ONE OF THE FIVE SUMMITS ASCENDED. IMMEDIATELY ABOVE THE CROSS MAY BE SEEN A "CHIMNEY"

enjoy the beautiful view and other interesting features of the scene about us.

The rope had been playing an important part in our climbing, as it does in every ascent of any magnitude, whether on snow or on rocks, and a word here as to its proper function will not be out of place. Its use on snow is readily explained. With three on the rope, if one of the party break through the surface, the others can prevent him from disappearing very far. Whereas any one, however careful, may break through the snow, the good climber will rarely, if ever, slip on rocks which he has once determined are fit to be climbed. And yet even in the case of such climbers the presence of the rope is indispensable as a means of steadying them and furnishing them with the moral courage or support necessary to enable them to attack difficult places. The question may be asked whether in the unlikely event of a slip the rope can be made to guard against its consequences. The answer is that usually it can, provided it be used with intelligence and skill; for at difficult places only one member of the party will advance at a time, and before he advances at least one of the others will lodge himself in a secure position and, if possible, double the rope around a firm knob of rock.

In connection with what is said here it must be remembered that only expert climbers can with safety undertake to scale rocks which present difficulties of the first order, and each member of the party should have full confidence in the ability of each of the others not only to climb without slipping, but also to render some assistance if the unexpected slip actually happen; and when the party is so constituted serious accident is a matter of very rare occurrence. He who finds himself requiring much active assistance from the rope on rocks should remain below, for it is not the province of the rope to enable the incompetent to be dragged up peaks. But there are instances where assistance is as proper as it is necessary, as when an almost perpendicular wall is met, with no cracks or holds and considerably higher than the reach of the leader. He may be able to ascend it only by first placing himself on the shoulders of the second man and

so on. Obviously in such a case the last man must haul himself up by the rope, or be hauled up by it.

The really serious work of the day came after leaving the Grande Pointe, for we had set ourselves the task of traversing, or crossing, the five principal summits of the Charmoz. The next one is known as Bâton Wils. Before reaching it we had to pass an extremely narrow shelf with a long drop (where anything resembling dizziness would have been entirely out of place) and scale another difficult chimney. Boulders and stones at great heights in the Alps are usually found placed upon each other in a manner most extraordinary and perplexing to the climber; why there should be fewer hand and foot-holds at these lofty elevations than lower down, I do not know. At a later point of the climb we came to two rocks, one known as the Pas Carré, which could not be crossed and had to be turned by their steep, rectangular corners to the left. Neither of these corners was inviting, for there was no place to put the feet except where the rocks curved slightly outwards near their base (and even then one could grip only with the tips of the boots), while the depths below were considerable. Before it was deemed safe to pass either, the second rope was so adjusted around firm knobs of rock as to serve as what the guides termed a "rampe" (literally, hand rail) in the event of a slip, of which, however, no one was guilty.

Thus, for about two hours we enjoyed what may be fairly termed severe climbing between five of the summits of this interesting aiguille. Fortunately the weather continued fine. It was warm and clear and there was not a breath of wind. We left the mountain by way of the fifth peak, from which we descended directly, encountering in the course of this descent a number of bad gullies with steep, smooth sides. Down three of them it was impossible to go except with the use of the second rope, which in each instance was carefully adjusted around a knob of rock at the top, so that it could be withdrawn by the last man. We regained the snow at the point where we had left the knapsacks and ice-axes, and once on it realized that we would have to make haste, for it was very warm and some three hundred feet of the route were likely at any moment to be swept

by avalanches from the steep glacier which came down from the Aiguille de la Blaitière. Across this space we hurried in double quick step and without further incident reached the Rognon at 1.30 and Montanvert at 4. The climb proved to be one of the best and most exciting I have ever enjoyed and also the last one of this my fifteenth season in the Alps.

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